

## Chapter 6 *School Meals*

### Module 6: M-and-M's for School Meals

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#### **Step Up and Step Out to market and model!**

Just think of all the mouthwatering restaurant and fast food ads we see every day. The ads are usually very attractive and fun! We don't expect anything less when it comes to *any* meals we purchase...whether it is eating "out" or at school!

Obviously there is not enough time or money to market at school the way big businesses do...with TV spots, magazine/newspaper ads, and radio jingles...but there *are* some very simple things that can be done to make healthy meals more attractive and increase participation!



First and most importantly, know your customer! Understand their needs, wants and values. School health initiative customers include students, parents, faculty, the community, administrators/board members, and last, but not least, the food service staff!

Early **Step Up and Step Out** schools have given feedback that helps to identify some of the factors that should be considered when marketing school meals.

#### **Marketing to students**



Why do students eat or not eat school meals? What can we do to gain their participation and support?

Student feedback indicates they want:

- ♥ Familiar, favorite foods
- ♥ Quick service
- ♥ Meal time to be a fun, social time with friends
- ♥ To feel less hurried at lunch
- ♥ Choices of menu items, salad bars, a la carte items
- ♥ Ownership, involvement in the menu planning

## Marketing to parents



Do parents have the same needs, wants, and values as their children regarding school meals?

Parent feedback indicates they want:

- ♥ Nutritious, healthy school meals
- ♥ Plenty of food offered so the kids are not hungry
- ♥ A pleasant, relaxed environment
- ♥ A good value for their meal cost
- ♥ Fewer prepared, convenience foods

Much like other family issues, there is usually a wide variance of ideas about school meals. Families can work together to understand each other's points of view, and make differences known to the coalition for consideration.

## Marketing to school staff



Teachers can be great advocates and allies for the school meal program. Not only do they spend a great deal of time interacting with the children, but also their own eating choices and activity behaviors are very visible. These things put teachers in a position to serve as important role models. What do they tell us about their expectations from school meals?

Teacher feedback indicates they want:

- ♥ Alternative menu choices such as salad bars
- ♥ In some cases, menus that are lower in calories than the student menu
- ♥ A relaxed meal time, time to take a break
- ♥ Children to understand the importance of healthy food choices when selecting a school meal
- ♥ To use school meals as a valuable teaching tool
- ♥ For children to waste less food

## **Marketing to community partners**



In order for community members, groups, and businesses to want to **Step Up and Step Out** and be a part of the team, each must understand and identify with the school meal program. Marketing outside the cafeteria, beyond the school walls to the community, might seem new to many but can yield great benefits for the program.

Community partner feedback indicates that this group:

- ♥ Often does not have much direct contact with the school meal program
- ♥ Relies on what others say to form an opinion about school meals and service
- ♥ Would like to be invited more frequently to be a part of the program

## **Marketing to administration and school board**



Now we consider the needs and concerns of the policy makers. While they must take into consideration all of the above mentioned expectations of school staff, parents, and students, other factors are also considered. This group is an important partner in creating a good marketing campaign, and in operating a successful school meal program.

School board and administrative feedback indicates they want:

- ♥ To see a balanced budget
- ♥ To hear positive feedback regarding the program from parents, students, and community (they often only hear the negative)
- ♥ Efficient school meal operations, but they often do not understand how to create efficient operations

## **Marketing to food service staff**



Food service staff are definite customers of school meals! They influence the presentation “feel,” and “touch” of the school meal program. Schools need the support, expertise, and involvement of these individuals.

Feedback from food service staff indicates they want:

- ♥ Children to enjoy the meals
- ♥ Adequate time and staff to provide quality meal service
- ♥ An opportunity to interact with the children
- ♥ To feel like a part of the school team working for children
- ♥ Administrative support
- ♥ More opportunities to communicate with parents, teachers, administration, and community for understanding



### *Hear Ye, Hear Ye...*

It is important to make people aware of the great things happening in the school meal program. Shout out success by marketing and modeling the creative programs, events, and activities of the school meal program.

## **Student activities**



### **Example 1: Build the Pyramid**

A large Food Guide Pyramid is painted on the cafeteria wall, and students place cafeteria menu item place cards in the appropriate food groups in the food pyramid. This makes for a great activity while waiting in the lunch line, and a visual teaching tool.

### **Example 2: Name that Room**

Students participate in an essay contest to name the school cafeteria. Essays are read each day over the intercom to the student body. Best essays and names are featured in the school newsletter, or the community paper. Coalition members serve as judges, or have the entire student body vote!

### **Example 3: Sharing Lunch**

Lunchtime should be a fun, relaxed time, but can also provide a learning experience. This time can be used to highlight student activities by having them share musical talents, selected artwork, readings, and other skills. The show and tell can lend itself to a quiet, relaxed mealtime and allow students to develop self-esteem and confidence as they share with the group.

## Parent activities



### **Example 1: Celebrate**

Parents and grandparents are invited to come join students for a Thanksgiving meal. Invitations are made in the classroom as part of a writing lesson, art project, or group activity. The activity incorporates a lesson in history, period dress (Pilgrim hats), and table manners. Caregivers have an opportunity to spend time with their student and learn first hand about the school meal program.

### **Example 2: Service with a Smile**

Students lead their families on a guided tour through the food service department. The students share their knowledge about the kitchen with parents, such as how many meals are served and meal guidelines. This activity can begin with students and families helping to serve the meal, sharing a meal together, and then concluding with the walk through tour, with students as tour guides.

## Teacher activities



### **Example 1: Inquiring Minds Want to Know!**

A teacher survey is conducted easily through a teacher newsletter. This survey allows for input regarding menu ideas, food service staff involvement in the classroom, student feedback, new ideas, theme day promotions, and concerns among other things. The key to this activity is to use the information provided to help improve service, and meet the needs of the students and staff. The teachers will feel part of the change, and be motivated as a partner to support the school meal program.

### **Example 2: Weigh Down!**

Many teachers struggle to find enough time to be physically active, and find selections to make healthy eating choices for maintaining a healthy weight. Offering fresh fruits and vegetables, healthy salad options, or other menu items teachers suggest creates support for the school meal program, while assisting them in making healthy lifestyle choices.

## Community activities



### **Example 1: Thank You Days!**

Invite to lunch community members who have shown support to the school or school meal program. Have the NAC group plan and present a short skit or activity during lunch that highlights accomplishments.

### **Example 2: Get Published!**

Have the local newspaper publish “meal tips” or favorite recipes scaled down to “family-sized” servings (remember to “test” the scaled down version first, since not all recipes can be scaled down without additional adjustments).

## Administration/board activities



### **Example 1: Presenters-Are-We!**

Have the NAC group present skits or activities that they have prepared for other audiences, at the school board meetings. Chances are the school board meeting will be well attended by parents as a result.

### **Example 2: Do You Know?**

Provide nutrient analysis information for foods and beverages served at school board meetings or other administrative functions. Include a “School Meal Program Thought for the Day,” i.e., nutrition information or school meal facts.

## Food service staff



### **Example 1: Walk and Talk**

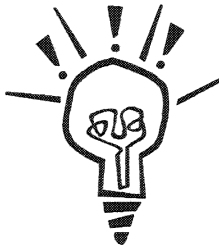
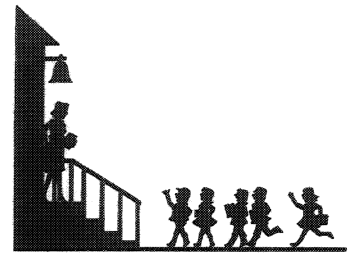
Food service staff model healthy behaviors by using break times, or after work hours to walk together as a team. This serves not only as a personal healthy lifestyle practice, which is an excellent modeled behavior for the students and other staff, but a creative way for staff to develop team work.

### **Example 2: Did You Know?**

Food service staff reads the lunch menu over the intercom, and also give short nutrition quizzes, and healthy eating messages. This serves to further link the students, faculty, and food service staff as one team. It also serves as a type of reward for food service staff.

## Planning school meal program M-and-M's

The school meal program plays a key role in the development and sustainability of a successful school health initiative. While most would agree with this statement, getting all partners to agree on what that role should be, and how to best involve the staff and school meal activities can be a challenge. Meet the challenge by getting feedback from all customers. Use the survey found at the end of this module to begin a very important step toward meeting your goals!



### Module Tip:

Opportunities to market and model the school meal program do not have to be time consuming, expensive, or difficult. Opportunities exist in the kitchen itself, the cafeteria, down the halls, and beyond the walls of the school into the community.

### FAQs:

- **Question:** What can be done to make it easy for the food service director to participate in marketing activities?

**Answer:** Working with the food service director, the coalition will lend support and resources whenever possible. Creating the plan with time lines provides review by which to determine if the activities are feasible, considering time and other resources available.



## School Meal Marketing Worksheet

A survey created to identify “customer” issues related to a school meal program in advance of creating a marketing plan is given as an example below. In actual practice, the questions can be modified to address specific questions in your community. Imagined responses from an “administrator,” the community group targeted for this survey are provided as an example.

### Example

### School Meal Survey



Indicate the Community Group Surveyed: Administrators/School Board

<b>1. What is the perceived image of your school meal program?</b>
<i>A necessary component in the school day.</i>
<b>2. Identify the purpose or goals of your school meal program:</b>
<i>Serve well-liked, nutritious meals within a specified budget.</i>
<b>3. Identify the strengths of your school meal program:</b>
<i>It meets the needs of students.</i>
<b>4. Identify the areas for possible improvement/change:</b>
<i>Stay within budget.</i>
<b>5. What makes a successful school meal program?</b>
<i>An operation that doesn't produce complaints from parents.</i>





### Example



An example of how the coalition used the responses of the administrator, and other administrators to create a School Meal Marketing Plan for that particular customer group is provided below.

### School Meal Marketing Ideas

<p><b>Identify opportunities for school meals to partner with the “customer group surveyed:</b></p> <p><i>Inform administrators of activities to better understand the school meal program by:</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <i>Presenting information and taste tests at school board meetings.</i></li> <li>2. <i>Creating a “Walk with the Administrator Program” for Food Service Staff as a part of wellness and recognition programs.</i></li> <li>3. <i>Establish a schedule for meeting with administrators on a regular basis.</i></li> </ol>
<p><b>Identify marketing steps that can be taken to address school meal misperceptions:</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <i>Send reports and newsletters about school meal activities to administrators and school board members.</i></li> <li>2. <i>Clarify budget/income issues.</i></li> </ol>

**Action:** Two survey forms are provided on the following pages, one for adults and another for kids.

1. Make copies of the surveys and give to a group of people who represent each of the different community groups: **food service staff (they are customers, too!), kids, parents, teachers, administration/board, and other community members.** Have each person answer the questions from their perspective.
2. Afterward, review the responses to address issues identified in order to develop a marketing ideas that will be included in your action planning.



## School Meal Survey

Indicate the Community Group Surveyed: \_\_\_\_\_

<b>1. What is the perceived image of your school meal program?</b>
<b>2. Identify the purpose or goals of your school meal program:</b>
<b>3. Identify the strengths of your school meal program:</b>
<b>4. Identify the areas for possible improvement/change:</b>
<b>5. What makes a successful school meal program?</b>



## Kid's School Meal Survey

Indicate the Community Group Surveyed: \_\_\_\_\_

**1. What do you think of first when I say, "school meals?"**

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**2. Why do you think there is a school meal program?**

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**3. What are the best things about your school meal program?**

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**4. What are the things being done now that might be better and how can you help?**

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**5. Are there other things that could be done to make a great meal program?  
How could you help?**

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## School Meal Marketing Ideas

**Customer group:**

**Identify opportunities for school meals to partner with the “customer group surveyed:**


**Identify marketing steps that can be taken to address school meal misperceptions:**
